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C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 001151

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [MASS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: BG HIGGINS VISITS NIGER; DEFENSE MINISTER PROVIDES
UPDATE ON HUMAN RIGHTS CASE, NEED FOR CONTINUING MIL-TO-MIL
ASSISTANCE

REF: A. NIAMEY 00533 (NOTAL)

[B](#). NIAMEY 00364 (NOTAL)

[C](#). NIAMEY 00113 (NOTAL)

[D](#). NIAMEY 00048 (NOTAL)

[E](#). 07 NIAMEY 01444

Classified By: DCM Eric P. Whitaker, Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#). (C) Summary: During a December 4 courtesy call by
visiting Commander of Special Operations) Africa Brigadier
General Patrick Higgins, Minister of National Defense Djida
Hamadou welcomed the latter's familiarization visit to Niger
and commended AFRICOM's progress. Minister Hamadou provided
an update regarding the December 2007 killing of seven
civilians, concluding that the matter stood in the hands of
the Ministry of Justice, and that the Ministry also waited
impatiently for its resolution. He then outlined historical
factors that led up to the conflict in the north with Tuareg
rebels, who he referred to as "bandits" that appeared to
have become "terrorists." Minister Hamadou expressed hopes
that the United States would also regard the rebels as such,
and assist Niger in countering them effectively by resuming
military-to-military training activities. End summary.

Minister Hamadou: AFRICOM and GON Listen, Benefit

[2](#). (C) On December 4, Brigadier General (BG) Patrick Higgins
paid a 45-minute courtesy call on Minister of National
Defense (MOND) Djida Hamadou. Following BG Higgin's update
on AFRICOM, Minister Hamadou thanked the Commander for taking
the time and making the effort to listen to Africans, and
noted that Niger had learned the importance of listening to
its citizens during its nearly ten years of democratization.
He thanked BG Higgins for visiting Niger, and referred to
common respect for peace and justice.

Hamadou: Incident in the "Hands of the MOJ"

[3](#). (C) Acting Defense Attache Pognon and DCM Whitaker raised
the matter of the December 2007 human rights abuses, wherein
Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN) soldiers killed seven civilians
in the north in an encounter, and reinforced the limitation
this necessarily placed on the extent and nature of U.S.
military cooperation with Niger. Minister Hamadou,
anticipating that interlocutors would raise the matter,
stated that he shared USG concerns regarding the incident.
He recalled Ambassador Allen's demarches (reftels) on the
matter, and noted that President Tandja had quickly
instructed the Ministry of Interior to present his
condolences following the incident, and had called for an
investigation, with those responsible sanctioned under the
law. Minister Hamadou underscored the importance of
following legal procedures closely in the matter, and not
wrongly pursuing a case against those who were innocent. He
added that if the victims of the incident had been police

officers or soldiers, that "others would have been killed" in acts of retribution.

¶4. (C) Minister Hadadou said that the FAN had received information on the situation from four sources: military commanders based in Agadez, troops on the ground, townspeople, and families of the victims. After the MOND had collected the evidence, it passed it on to the Ministry of Justice for analysis and legal interpretation. He added that the Government of Niger (GON) had neither come to any conclusions nor rushed to judgment. The dossier remains at the Ministry of Justice, he concluded, and the MOND awaits adjudication of the case.

¶5. (C) Minister Hamadou said that Niger had made many sacrifices in fighting bandits in the north, and that ensuring the maintenance of national unity was a foremost goal. Many soldiers in the units fighting them are U.S.-trained, he said, and the United States is the best trained military in the world. Even so, all militaries make mistakes, even if they have received training in human rights and try to defend them in the field. This, he said, was not an excuse, but an explanation that soldiers do make errors. He cited the complexities of military operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. BG Higgins expressed his appreciation for the Minister's update on the status of the case, and acknowledged that the Ministry of Justice was a separate governmental entity not under the MOND's control. BG Higgins noted that General Ward, AFRICOM Commander, is anxious for this matter to be resolved fully and successfully, so that the training partnership could be restored.

Hamadou: History Lesson on Niger and the Tuareg

¶6. (C) Minister Hamadou asked if BG Higgins knew Nigerien history. Without waiting for a reply, he said that the French had "written the book" on Niger's history, and had gotten Niger off to a rough start as a republic by pushing for the "extermination" of "white Tuaregs." When the young republic's first president, Hamani Diori, took office in 1960, however, he established a ministry of nomad and Saharan affairs, and emphasized that Tuaregs were fully Nigeriens. The Government sent Hausa, Zarma (Djerma), and Fulani teachers to the north, assigning them to Tuareg encampments. This effort was successful, he added, and is why there are physicians and engineers among the Tuaregs working throughout the country. When Nigeriens refer to ethnic minorities today, they are referring not to Tuaregs, but to smaller groups, such as the Gourmantche.

¶7. (C) The Tuaregs, he continued, gradually gave up raiding villages, and settled, attending schools, opening businesses, and working for the government. Even so, Tuaregs did not take up skilled trades, such as masonry or electrical work, and often preferred to work as guards. A 1991 national Tuareg conference and the 1993 first democratically elected government led to a conference on Tuareg affairs and national unity that included participation by the French, Algerians, and Burkinabe. This resulted in the incorporation of Tuaregs in the customs office, police force, and the military's specialized unit, the National Force for Security and Intervention (FNIS). In 2007, he said, some of these Tuaregs, with their newly acquired training and weapons, went back to the bush to challenge the GON's authority. The GON, however, will not negotiate with them until they lay down their arms.

Hamadou: "Bandits" are "Terrorists;" U.S. Should Assist

¶8. (C) Minister Hamadou outlined President Tandja's intentions, which he said were for dissident Tuaregs to put aside their weapons and talk with the GON about their &political motives.8 The conflict) "chaos" - had taken a toll on Niger, with 230 killed, 680 wounded, 17 women raped, 87 vehicles burned, and the passengers of 18 vehicles

held up by bandits to date. More recently, the pattern had been the placement of land mines, which destroyed two or three vehicles each week, with civilian casualties. If the dissident Tuaregs are not willing to discuss outstanding political grievances and their actions continue to harm civilians, then the so-called "bandits" must be "terrorists," and the United States, as a friend of Niger, should help it to fight them. President Tandja is willing to discuss issues with them if they lay down their arms; indeed, the GON is willing to assist their re-integration into society, and all would be forgiven if they did so.

¶9. (C) He concluded by stating that this was his version of Niger's history, and that BG Higgins was free to travel and talk to people in Niger at will. BG Higgins thanked him for this detailed account, and noted the complex issues involved.

He expressed an appreciation for Niger's patient approach to the issue, and underscored the importance of AFRICOM in building national capacity to address security challenges.

Comment

¶10. (C) The meeting involved both text and sub-text: Niger is pursuing the human rights case, but remains frustrated that U.S.-Niger military-to-military cooperation cannot proceed as before, especially given the threat posed by dissident Tuaregs in the north. The resolution of the matter is no longer in its hands, and it has done all it can to expedite the process fairly. It seemed clear that the MOND takes the incident seriously, but remains frustrated by the lengthy process of resolving it. As well, perhaps the MOND faults the USG for not understanding the historical context and complexity of the issue fully. End comment.

¶11. (SBU) BG Higgins cleared this message prior to departing Niamey.

ALLEN